



**Northern Illinois
University**

**Exploring Faculty Perspectives on
Implementing Online Competency-Based
Modules for ECE Preparation**

Melissa Clucas Walter, Ph.D.

Florensia Surjadi, Ph.D.

Gateways Higher Education Forum

Objectives



1. Discuss the benefits and challenges of integrating online competency-based education (CBE) modules into early childhood professional preparation programs
2. Identify key strategies and supports that faculty have used to successfully implement CBE modules and address common barriers
3. Apply findings from faculty experiences to design or improve support structures for both faculty and students using CBE modules

What is Competency-Based Education (CBE)?



Formal Definition

“An outcome-based approach to education that incorporates modes of instructional delivery and assessment efforts designed to evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors required for the degree sought.” (Gervais, 2016)

What is Competency-Based Education (CBE)?



- Focused on **actual student learning**, and the **application** of that learning, rather than time spent in class/on material
- Learners' **progress** is measured when they **demonstrate** their competence through a **system of rigorous assessments**, meaning they **prove** they have **proficient** knowledge and skills **required** for a particular **competency** or area of study.

What Are the Five Elements of the Competency Education Definition?



Students advance upon demonstrated mastery



Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience



Competencies include explicit measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students



Students receive timely and differentiated support



Students develop and apply a broad set of skills and dispositions

Why CBE for ECE Teacher Preparation?



- Focuses on mastery of the skills and knowledge required; may increase job readiness
- Offers flexible and individualized learning
 - Students can learn at their own pace, according to their learning styles
 - Can accommodate those with prior experience or those who need more time to master certain competencies
- Responsive to the unique needs of the current ECE workforce and working adults
- Expands educational opportunities that pave the way for obtaining degrees and credentials
 - May help address the ECE professionals shortage

Context



- Illinois Gateways to Opportunity ECE Credential Competency Pilot Project
 - A follow-up to the Gateways to Opportunity ECE Credential competency-based modularization Project
- Each selected two-year and four-year institution in IL piloted between 35 to 40 of the total Gateways ECE Credential competencies modules
- The modules were piloted in two modalities at NIU:
 - **For degree-seeking students:** Integrated into traditional courses
 - **For non-degree-seeking professionals:** Online competency modules that correspond to the ECE credential level being sought

Gateways Modules in Child Development Classes



Semester	Course	Modules	Enrollment
Spring 2021	HDFS 331 (Infant/Toddler Curriculum)	HGD3, HSW2	25
Spring 2021	HDFS 399 (Professional Orientation)	PPD5, PPD6, PPD7, PPD10	10
Spring 2021	FACS 460 (Independent Study)	FCR7, PPD8, PPD9, IRE6, IRE7, CPD8	4
Fall 2021	HDFS 230 (Child Development)	HGD1, HGD2	85
Fall 2021	HDFS 231 (Observation & Assessment)	OA1, OA2, OA3, OA4, OA5	20
Fall 2021	HDFS 330 (Guidance)	HSW1, HSW3, IRE1, IRE2, IRE3,	25
Fall 2021	HDFS 330A (Lab component)	HSW4, IRE5	15
Fall 2021	HDFS 332 (Preschool Curriculum)	CPD1, CPD2, CPD4, CPD5, CPD6	25
Fall 2021	HDFS 332A (Lab component)	IRE4, CPD3	15
Fall 2021	HDFS 399 (Professional Orientation)	PPD5, PPD6, PPD7, PPD10, HGD6	10
Fall 2021	HDFS 432 (Child Development Theories)	HGD5	15
Fall 2021	HDFS 434 (Administration of Programs)	CPD10, HSW7, HSW8, OA7, OA8	12
Fall 2021	FACS 460 (Independent Study)	FCR7, PPD8, PPD9, IRE6, IRE7, CPD8	4
Total	12 courses	39 modules	265 students

Screenshot of Module Layout integrated in a Child Development Course



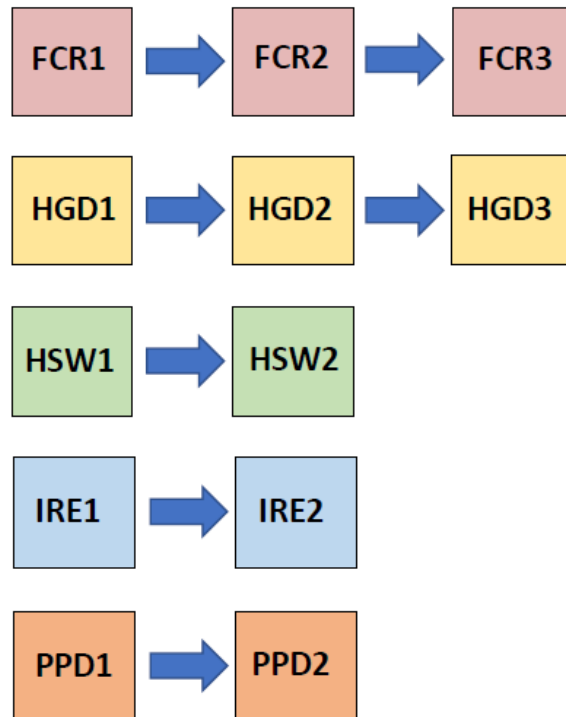
Module layout screenshot showing a list of items:

- HGD3 Overview**
 - Visible to students
- HGD3 Module Task List.docx** (with icons for a document, a globe, and a person)
 - Visible to students
- Sub-competency 1: Describes how cultural and familial contexts and biological and environmental influences impact children's well-being and learning**
 - Visible to students
 - Activity 1: Understanding Culture Activity 2: Learning About Families and Culture Activity 3: Biological and Environmental Influences on Child Development Activity 4: Early Experiences Shape Brain Architecture
- HGD3 Activity 1.1: Understanding Culture**
 - Visible to students
 - Due date: 2/1/21, 11:59 PM (CST)
- HGD3 Activity 1.2: Learning About Families and Culture**
 - Visible to students
 - Due date: 2/1/21, 11:59 PM (CST)
- HGD3 Activity 1.3: Biological and Environmental Influences on Child Development**
 - Visible to students
 - Due date: 2/1/21, 11:59 PM (CST)
- HGD3 Activity 1.4: Early Experiences Shape Brain Architecture**
 - Visible to students
 - Due date: 2/1/21, 11:59 PM (CST)

Example of Non-Degree Seeking Pathway



To Level 2 ECE Credential*



Content areas:

FCR = Family and Community Relationships

HGD = Human Growth and Development

HSW = Health, Safety, and Well-Being

IRE = Interactions, Relationships, and Environments

PPD = Personal and Professional Development

*A total of 12 online modules

Screenshot of Module Layout for Non-Degree Seeking Student



HGD1 Overview

Competency Statement

HGD1: Identifies and describes theories of typical and atypical growth in all developmental domains and the interaction between individual and contextual factors on development and learning.

Competency Description

The how and the why children's development unfolds is a fascinating topic. While we were each once child ourselves and likely know children of varied ages, understanding factors that contribute to growth and development is specialized knowledge essential for all early childhood professionals. In this module, you will have an opportunity to explore the "why" of development through examination of developmental theories and the "how" of development through exploration of milestones, typical and atypical patterns of development, and the impact of the broader context on development and learning. This module provides you with an opportunity to explore each of these critical factors in more depth. In your formative assessment you will identify and describe developmental theory and developmental milestones as well as explore and identify characteristics of developmental concerns. You will also have an opportunity to identify contextual factors that influence development and learning.

Sub-Competencies

Sub-competency 1: Identify and describe developmental milestones and theories.

Sub-competency 2: Identify and describe typical and atypical patterns of development, including characteristics of delays/disabilities (non-typical development).

Sub-competency 3: Identify and describe cultural impacts on development (including gender, family, race, ethnicity, language, ability, socioeconomics, religion, and society).



Sub-competency 1: Identify and describe developmental milestones and theories.

Instructions

You will complete the following activities in this Sub-competency:

- HGD1 Activity 1.1
- HGD1 Activity 1.2
- HGD1 Activity 1.3
- HGD1 Activity 1.4



Sub-competency 2: Identify and describe typical and atypical patterns of development, including characteristics of delays/disabilities (non-typical development).

Instructions

You will complete the following activities in this Sub-competency:

- HGD1 Activity 2.1
- HGD1 Activity 2.2

CBE Module Structure



Overview

- Competency statement
- Competency description
- Sub-competencies

Activities

- May involve reading online articles, watching videos, or engaging with content in peers
- Completed as homework and/or in-class depending on course
- Pass/fail grading

Summative Assessment

- Determine whether student has achieved the competency
- Applied assignments (NO tests!)

Module Survey

- Completed after receiving feedback on summative assessment
- Provided detailed feedback on the module that was used to revise the modules!
- Surveys were anonymous

Discussion Question -1



Considering the **diverse experiences** of instructors, **what support or structural changes might be necessary** to ensure that CBE can be both effective and sustainable in ECE teacher preparation programs?

Discussion Question - 2



How can institutions better support instructors in implementing CBE modules, and **what infrastructure is needed** to ensure **consistency, flexibility, and quality** in student learning experiences?

Discussion Question - 3



What types of institutional, instructional, and student-level **supports** are most essential for scaling CBE in ECE programs, and how might these be prioritized during implementation?

Implications for Implementing CBE Modules



Instructor preparation and support are crucial



Student success depends on orientation and skill-building



Quality of materials directly affects engagement and outcomes



Balance between flexibility and structure is needed



Collaboration and community enhance CBE experiences

Implications for ECE Teacher Preparation



CBE offers an alternative, flexible pathway



CBE modules can help ensure mastery of essential skills



Instructor perspectives highlight the importance of well-designed, learner-centered materials



Targeted faculty support and training are essential



Program structures must evolve



This model holds promise for addressing the ECE teacher workforce shortage

Thank You!



Interested in CBE Modules for ECE Professional Preparation?



- FREE competency-based modules aligned with Gateways competencies are available for the following credentials:
 - Early Childhood Education Credential: Levels 2-5
 - Infant Toddler Credential: Levels 2-6
 - Illinois Director Credential: Levels 1-3
- Please note the modules are in a document format. You or someone at your institution will need to create the module in your learning management system.
- Please contact Julie Lindstrom at Jlindstrom@inccrra.org to request access to the modules.